

Reviews

SHORT NOTICES

THE EAGLETON READER edited by Stephen Regan *Blackwell Publishers* 1998, xvi + 454 pp., £14.99 paperback.

'To call Terry Eagleton the most gifted Marxist thinker of his generation', as Stephen Regan says in his preface to this valuable and highly entertaining anthology, 'is only a slender acknowledgement of his critical and creative achievements'. The six sections, each illuminatingly introduced by the editor, display the range and variety of Eagleton's work: literary criticism, cultural politics/sexual politics, Marxism and critical theory, modernism and postmodernism, friends and philosophers, and Ireland's own. The excellent index locates him in conversation with Adorno, Benjamin, Brecht, and other Marxists, with just as many references to Matthew Arnold, T.S. Eliot, F.R. Leavis and Raymond Williams, as well as to Freud, Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Wittgenstein and Oscar Wilde. Frequently mentioned topics listed in the index, such as the body, language, and liberal humanism, would open a different way into Eagleton's work. As Regan notes, theology crops up, in fact nearly everywhere, though the references are dispersed in the index. The bibliographies are comprehensive, including ten pages of by no means always sympathetic or even comprehending reviews of Eagleton's books: yet another way into the history of his interventions over the years. As Regan says, the best introduction is perhaps 'The Ballad of Marxist Criticism', the verses of the song (to the tune of 'Something Stupid' by Nancy and Frank Sinatra), printed at the end of the volume, in which Eagleton parodies the colourful and adventurous intellectual career that has taken him from the undergraduate essays in *Slant* to the inaugural lecture as a professor in Oxford, from *The New Left Church* to *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger* and *The Illusions of Postmodernism*. All the way along, his prolific writing is marked by passion for justice, omnivorous reading, and playful irony (often turned on himself). The *Reader* is dedicated to Oliver Francis Eagleton; the bibliography closes a month or two too soon to catch his father's fine homily at his baptism (*The Furrow* July/August 1997, page 419).